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Creating quarter for doing things with language

Abstract: In this article I deal with language policy as it is aimed at changing the language practice of certain people within a group (Spolsky 2004). I will especially focus on instances of language policy that are meant to have an emancipatory function: policy is aimed at changing the language practice of some people in order for them to function in situations that are considered socially important. I start my account of successes and failures in language policy with an exploration of the concept of language. I will try to make clear that there are two concepts of language which are commonly used, and that these concepts differ from one another in the way the relation between variation and uniformity in language is seen. I will situate these concepts in Realist Social Theory (RST), and will go into the consequences of interpreting language from one of these angles for the effectiveness of language policy.

Keywords: language policy, concepts of language, emancipatory education, effectiveness of policies

Samenvatting: In dit artikel ga ik in op taalbeleid als een middel om het taalgebruik te veranderen van bepaalde mensen die behoren tot een groep (Spolsy 2004). Ik richt me vooral op die vormen van taalpolitiek die een emancipatorische functie hebben: het gaat daarbij om beleid dat erop gericht is het taalgebruik van mensen te veranderen zodat zij kunnen functioneren in situaties die sociaal belangrijk geacht worden. Ik start mijn verslag van de successen en het falen van taalbeleid met een verkenning van het concept 'taal'. Ik probeer duidelijk te maken dat er twee concepten zijn die allebei gebruikt worden, en dat die concepten van elkaar verschillen in de manier waarop met de relatie tussen variatie en uniformiteit in taal wordt omgegaan. Ik situeer die concepten in Realist Social Theory (RST), en behandel daarna de gevolgen van een taalbeleid dat bij een van deze concepten aansluit.

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Zusammenfassung: In diesem Artikel bespreche ich die Sprachpolitik als Mittel um den Sprachgebrauch zu ändern von bestimmten Menschen, die zu einer Gruppe gehören (Spolsky 2004). Ich konzentriere mich vor allem auf diejenigen Formen der Sprachpolitik, die eine emanzipatorische Funktion haben: Dabei handelt es sich um Politik, die sich zum Ziel setzt, den Sprachgebrauch von Menschen zu ändern, sodass sie in als sozial wichtig betrachteten Situationen funktionieren könnten. Ich fange meinen Bericht über die Erfolge und das Versagen der Sprachpolitik mit einer Exploration des Konzepts ‚Sprache' an. Ich versuche deutlich zu machen, dass es zwei Konzepte gibt, die beide verwendet werden, und dass die Konzepte sich voneinander unterscheiden in der Weise, auf die mit der Beziehung zwischen Variation und Uniformität in der Sprache umgegangen wird. Ich ordne diese Konzepte in die Realist Social Theory (RST) ein, und behandle danach die Folgen einer Sprachpolitik, die sich einem dieser Konzepte anschließt.

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1 Uniformity and variation in linguistic and social theory

The perspective on uniformity and variation in language is one of the most fundamental issues in linguistics. The most simple of linguistic observations indicate that language shows at the same time a remarkable tendency toward uniformity of patterns, and a great variety with which these patterns are realized. The debate about how this uniformity and variation are related, lies at the core of the major schools of thought in modern linguistics.

In structuralism, the issue was solved by positing a language system which is characterized by uniformity, and regarding variation as a phenomenon that occurs when that uniform language system is used. De Saussure talked about langue and parole, Chomsky of competence and performance.

> *L'étude du langage comporte donc deux parties: l'une, essentielle, a pour objet la langue, qui est sociale dans son essence et indépendante de l'individu; cette étude est uniquement psychique; l'autre, secondaire, a pour objet la parole individuelle du langage, c'est-à-dire la parole y compris la phonation: elle est psycho-physique.* [The study of language consists of two parts: the most essential one has as object language, which is in essence social and independent of the individual; this study is solely non-material; the other part, which is secondary, has as object individual speech, that is to say speech including pronunciation: this part is psycho-physical] (Bailly and Séchaye 1916: 37)

In Chomsky's terms, performance is characterized by "grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors" (Chomsky 1965: 3).

In a modern functionalist perspective, language is no longer seen as primarily a uniform system which is used in a variable way. Language is seen as an emergent product of human intersubjectivity, the product of joint activity aimed at achieving goals (Clark 1996: 33). When people meet, they develop shared intentionality (Tomassello 2003), which leads them to joint action in which they need to coordinate their behavior with others (Clark 1996). Solving more complicated coordination problems requires language, or rather, language greatly facilitates solving these problems. Language itself can be seen as the solution to coordination problems. In that sense, language emerges from the interaction between partners in joint actions (Jaspaert 2014; Lee 2009).

From such a functionalist perspective, language is a situated product, which turns out differently when the situation it occurs in, changes. In that sense variation is a fundamental and inherent characteristic of language, and what needs to be explained is where the uniformity comes from. It can be argued that the process through which coordination problems are solved, creates a form of uniformity in use. Ullmann-Margalit (1977) describes how social norms are created as an answer to frequent confrontation with a coordination problem. She distinguishes four steps in the norm creation process, from the confrontation with the coordination problem, over statistic expectations about which solution of the coordination problem will be chosen, and deontic expectations about the solution to be chosen, to the codification of that solution as an explicit norm. One could call this process a form of systematization of language use. As the social norms, or rules, that emerge from this systematization process are codified, they turn into a language system, an autonomous set of language rules that define a language as a uniform institutional fact (Searle 2005). Unlike the way the relationship between uniformity and variation is viewed in a structuralist perspective, from a functional point of view, the concept of a language referring to an autonomous system is just as real as the language emerging from interaction. Both are occurrences of language that make conceptualization of language in society a constant dialectic choice.

In sociolinguistics, the issue of variation in language use has been studied from different angles. In a lot of instances, the fact that there is a uniform and a variable way of looking at language is used as a starting point by most sociolinguistists. The relation between these two conceptualizations of language is seldom overtly discussed, however. The variable side of language is usually associated with use, and a case is made against those who want to exclude the study of language use as uninteresting. Wardhaugh (2006), e.g., claims that "a

recognition of variation implies that we must recognize that a language is not just some kind of abstract object of study. It is also something that people use" (Wardhaugh 2006: 5).

He goes on to state that "meaningful insights into language can be gained only if such matters as use and variation are included as part of the data which must be explained in a comprehensive theory of language; such a theory of language must have something to say about the uses of language" (Wardhaugh 2006: 5). As Labov (1972) pointed out, variation is part of language use, but is not random. It follows patterns that tell us a lot about the social position of the people using the language. By introducing variable rules, he created an opportunity to incorporate the description of variability into the uniform language. In this way, the importance of variation was raised without questioning the dominance of the concept referring to the uniform system. Recently a lot of work has been done studying the super-diversity (Vertovec 2007) of language use (see, e.g. Blommaert and Rampton 2011). In this line of research, the conceptualization of language in terms of uniformity is used as a point of departure, documenting the wide variety of divisions made within that general language concept. In that sense, what is documented is not really the inherent variety that comes with an variational concept of language, but the way in which multiple uniform structures get mingled in actual use. Language is divided into innumerous subsystems, which by themselves are characterized by uniformity. In the same way, the term *languaging* is often used to refer to the practice of using different linguistic features that are at the disposal of the language user, regardless of the fact whether they belong to the same language system or not (Jørgensen 2008). Here again, a lot of the work done consists of description of the features and the language systems they are borrowed from. A line of research that does pay attention to the two perspectives on language is the work being done on enregisterment (Agha 2003; Johnstone et al. 2006). Specific aspects of dialect reification are documented and discussed.

The dialectic conceptualization of language in terms of an autonomous, uniform system on the one hand, and a emergent property of human interaction on the other, does not only have a basis in linguistics. Major sociologists, as Bourdieu (1977, 1982) have paid attention to this distinction. Bourdieu's concepts of linguistic market and linguistic habitus are closely related to the two concepts of language elaborated above (Jaspaert 1986). In more general terms, the two conceptualizations can be linked to Popper's (1978) World 2 and World 3 perspectives on reality and they can be seen as the exponents of a structure versus an agency approach to language (Carter and Sealey 2000).

2 Uniformity and Variation of language in RST

From an RST point of view, the concept of language which attributes centrality to uniformity and sees variability as an effect of use could be seen as a concept that is part of the Cultural System. As such RST sees this perspective on language as an epistemic concept. For people within a certain cultural system, however, a language in this form is an institutional fact (Searle 2005) and, as such, is as real as other material goods. Moreover, as this institutional fact is an objectification of social inequality (see below), in this way it is used to reinforce that inequality in disguise (as the 'proper' cultural way to use the language). For people within a certain culture, one could claim that the institution of language works as an element of structure. Since in this paper I am concerned with how people within a culture see language as a material object and the consequences this has for language policy, I will refer to this institutional fact as language as structure, although I realize that, in view of the fact that I claimed that this concept of language is a byproduct of language emerging out of interaction, in RST terms, it could not be part of structure. The concept that sees variability as a essential characteristic of language, with uniformity being the result of language use can be seen as part of agency.

As Carter and Sealey (this volume) point out, in RST it is important to ask the question who is to benefit from a change in behavior and who benefits from a status quo. At first sight it seems as if the use of the uniform concept of language is to the equal advantage of everybody. Typical for a coordination problem is that there are multiple solutions which are all equivalent at the onset of the problem. Through the process of norm formation, one solution acquires superior value because it gradually becomes to be regarded as the 'best' solution, first in statistic and later in deontic terms, for the problem. As the norm formation process results in a codified norm, that norm is entered in grammar books, dictionaries and other works describing the language. These books make the norm of 'a' language reside on the bookshelf, external of the language user. In non-historical terms, this language is socially sterile: there is not one social group which forces the use of a certain language on another group, it is the characteristics of the language which determine how it should be used correctly. In reality, however, different solutions do not have equal chance of becoming the norm. As it turns out, practices of those holding power have a far better chance of being accepted as norm than practices of the less powerful. In most cases coordination problems are in reality partiality problems: the language emerging from the language practice of the dominant class tends to serve as a basis for norm formation. In that sense, the language resulting from the agency of the dominant class forms the basis for the language as it becomes part of structure, and objectifies social inequality by

making that social inequality a result of the dominant group being better in handling the socially sterile 'correct' form of language. Remark that what we are talking about here is not mere action, but situated action, as it takes place in settings that are clearly marked by our structural positions as language users. Which variants and varieties of language we are going to use, is determined by the structural conditions we are acting in. Let me give an example to clarify this point: when my mother, whom I had always spoken a local dialect of Dutch with, asked me to explain what I was doing as PhD research project, I heard myself drifting in my explanation to a standard form of Dutch. That made my mother angry, because she considered that as an indication of the fact that I considered her not smart enough to understand. As a matter of fact, what happened was that the situatedness of the topic of my PhD project placed it outside the realm of the things my mother and I could discuss using the language we used for all our discussions.

So from a historical perspective, the uniform concept of (a) language, as it resides on bookshelves, has become part of structure. As this process coincides with the objectification of social structure described above, not only the language system is reified as a structure, but at the same time, social structure is objectified and reproduced in 'a' language. Members of the dominant class in society acquire prestige through their language use, not because they managed to make their practice be accepted as the overall norm, but because there exists an ideal structure of language which they manage to use best. For this to work, it is necessary that there is general recognition (in both senses of the word) of the norm (of the autonomous value of the language system) within a society, but that the potential to behave normatively is unequally distributed (Bourdieu 1982). The general recognition of the reified language system as the norm and its inclusion in the cultural system means that that concept of (a) language becomes part of the worldview of those living within that culture (Heine et al. 2006). When a concept is part of the world view that is shared within a culture, it means that members of that cultural group will perceive the elements of the world pertaining to the phenomenon the concept is tied to, as coinciding with that conceptual description. So in the case of a language, people will see that language as an external uniform system that is part of the cultural system. Deviations from that system they will regard as errors made by people who are not able to produce language that conforms to the uniform norm all the time. At the same time the agency related concept is just as real: when in a given situation which requires a certain form of language use, people will produce that form and not worry too much about the fact that their language behavior diverts from that uniform norm structure. The two concepts actively determine how we look at language at the same time: The structure concept dominates

our conscious thought on language, whereas the agency related concept is used whenever we are using language while being focused on something else. This double view can be observed when the concept of language as it is used in the press is examined. In her master thesis, Kerckhofs (2014) investigated which of both concepts journalists referred to when they wrote about language. She investigated articles written in two Flemish newspapers for the years 1999 and 2011. She found that journalists conceptualize language as a uniform system that is made variable through improper use, except when they are dealing with artists and their works. With artists they look for how well they used variability in language to capture the ideas and emotions they want to express.

In a lot of instances, the two concepts of language coexist. People meet and solve coordination problems that occur in a way that fits the situation and the intersubjectivity that characterizes it the best. As a result they often behave in a way that the conscious concept of language they have stored in their world view defines as corrupt. In a lot of instances, the discrepancy between language behavior and world view of language goes unnoticed. Whenever they clash, that clash is either drawn to the conscious level, or it is embedded in a situation where other forms of striving towards an equilibrium (Dreyfus 1996) predominate. That is why my mother got angry with me for not using dialect, but at the same time worried that I made too many errors when speaking French. The way a conflict between the two concepts of language is resolved, is also heavily influenced by the power structure of society of which we have claimed earlier that it is objectified in the structure concept of language. So whenever we pay conscious attention to the so called imperfection of language use, the question of power enters in disguise. When it is pointed out to people that their behavior does not conform to the external language norms and rules, people in a dominant position most likely will react in a "So what?" manner. As they master the uniform language to some extent, they are able to let their behavior pass as an adaptation to the situation. People in a dominated position will probably accept the discrepancy as a sign of their own lack of cultural capital, which prevents them from realizing the ideal language system correctly. So, how a person judges his/her own language use, and how that language use is judged by others, depends to a large extent on the question whether the use and judgment emerge from a structure or agency perspective.

In what follows, I will refer to the double conceptualization of language with language as agency and language as structure. The main differences between the two concepts are listed in figure 1.

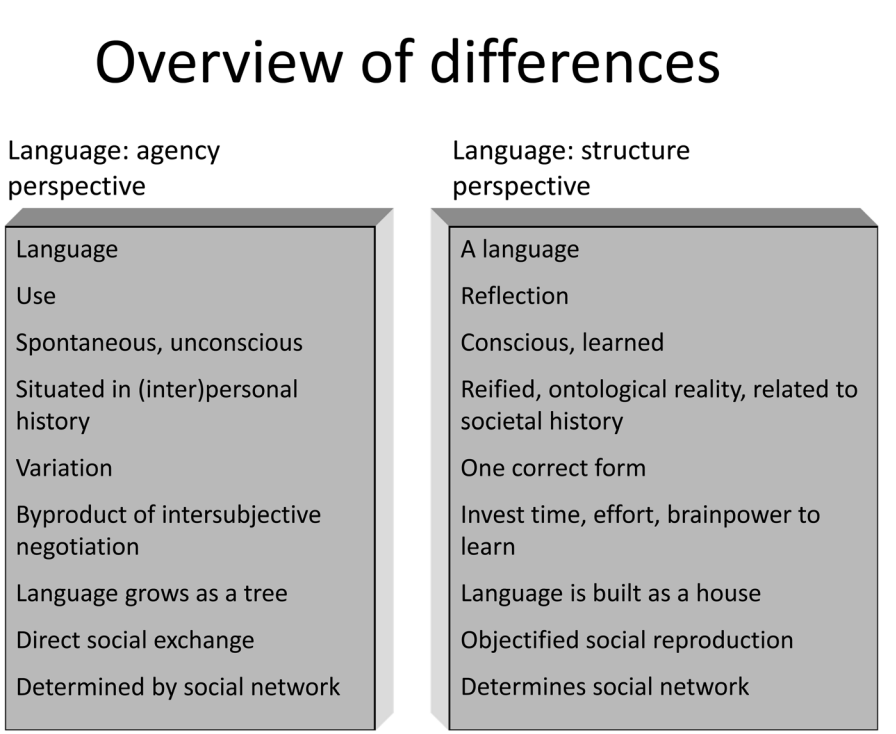

Figure 1: Overview of differences between the two concepts of language.

3 Effects of the double conceptualization on language policy

Let us now return to language policy. A policy is in itself a formalized way to solve a coordination problem. People have worked out a solution for the problem, and have turned the solution into a prescription on how people should act. In that sense, the prescription carries the objectified form of structural power relation within itself just as the structure concept of language does. Creating a policy for emancipation is, therefore, always a tricky business. In the more traditional forms of language policy, this does not matter much, since the policy was aimed at raising the status or developing the corpus of a given language further (Kloss 1969). This form of language policy did not have an explicit emancipatory goal within one society; it tried to raise the status of the people using that language in the cultural competition between societies. The policy towards the status of Dutch in Belgium that started to emerge around 1850 and is still an important part of

Belgian society, can serve as an example. The policy was started by people who did not manage to translate their economic success into cultural capital (Jaspaert and Van Belle 1987). The aim of the policy was not emancipation of the people in Flemish society who were not given chances for development, the policy was aimed at giving the dominant group in Flemish society a place within the Belgian establishment. It is clear that for such a policy, the structure concept of language comes in very handy. By choosing for the Dutch language (and not devising some form of Flemish), the patrons of the movement chose a language that was well established, had a large literature, was used in a country that had colonies. The idea was that the prestige of the language would radiate towards Flanders, not that everybody should start using the language in the way the Dutch did. Later, with a number of societal changes occurring, the idea of using policy to democratize society stepped in. In instances where that was the aim, language policy was aimed at altering the language practice of people. In order for emancipation to be successful, people had to use a certain language variety within certain situations. And that language variety is described in structure terms as an objectified, external entity which the people to be emancipated had to learn. The consequence of this action is that, when it is successful, not only the language variety these people use in other situations is devaluated, as it is now regarded as either a 'corrupt' form of the variety determined by the structure concept of language, or it is put aside as a form of a less valuable language, but also the situations these language varieties are used in, are devaluated as they are not important enough to require the 'correct' form of the language. So, policy creates variation in language use by promoting the use of the structure concept of language in certain situations, but at the same time devaluates other environments and the language varieties used as solutions to coordination problems that occur in these environments. That other solutions to coordination problems are devaluated puts the people that are targeted by the policy in a difficult position: they either accept the help to function in situations that are considered socially important, but when they do, they also accept the devaluation of much of their lifeworld and the language they use in it. Or they resist the pressure exerted by the policy, in that way protecting the way to act linguistically in their own lifeworld, but at the same time accepting that they will not be able to function adequately in those situations that are considered socially important. Emancipatory language policy that starts from a structure concept of language forces people targeted by the policy to sleep in a Procrustean bed, as it were. And as far as the effectiveness of the policy is concerned, by grafting the policy actions on a concept of language which propagates the autonomous value of one specific language variety, a lot of people are forced to choose the second option, rendering the policy only minimally effective.

In order to make some of the elements more concrete, let us look at policy aimed at creating language proficiency in education. When examining this field, it is important to note that, depending on the concept of language which is utilized, different forms of teaching are developed. In the case of a structure departure point of language education, where language is external to users and needs to be introduced in its correct form to them, an explicit approach to language teaching is very often selected. Language is built as a house (figure 1), in the sense that language elements are brought to the construction site as elements are with which a house is built. They are already in their definitive form, ready to get their place in the house and keeping that definitive form for as long as the language learner uses language. From this perspective, it is a waste of time to acquire forms of language that the uniform system of language labels as incorrect. The success of this approach depends to a large extent on four characteristics of the teaching situation. First of all, what is important is the professional skill of the teacher. The teacher must know which elements to select at what time, and how these elements can best be transferred to the student. The second factor of importance is time. The more time one has, the more information about a language can be passed on from the teacher to the student. Thirdly, the cognitive abilities of the student play an important role. The smarter the student is, the more external knowledge about a language (s)he can process in a given period of time. The fourth factor is language proficiency. When passing on the information on language elements from the teacher to the student, the teacher packs that information in language and sends the message to the student. If the student is unable to unpack the information, chances are that (s)he will not learn. The last characteristic of effective explicit education already points towards some sort of Catch 22 situation: one has to be proficient in a language in order to acquire language proficiency. When one is proficient in language A and uses that proficiency to acquire language B, this might work to some extent, but for students for whom the language that is used in schools is the same language as the one they need to be made proficient in, there is a problem. At the same time, from a policy point of view, the characteristics 3 and 4 are not easily manipulatable with a policy that takes the structure concept of language as a starting point. One cannot increase the cognitive ability of a student by ordering the student to process more linguistic information in a given time. Nor can this form of language policy offer a way out of the Catch 22 situation. So what we see is that most policies aimed at improving the proficiency in a certain language are aimed at the first two characteristics of explicit education: Teacher training is changed, and teachers need to be trained more, by altering the initial teacher training or by providing additional in-service training, or the time spent on language teaching is increased in one way or the other. When these interventions do not work, policy makers and

people in education come to the conclusion that the reason for the failure of the students has to be looked for in the two other characteristics of sound language education: either the student is not smart enough or his language proficiency is too low because his/her environment was not willing to substitute their own language use by the use of the dominant language, in that way buying more time for the dominant language. In other words, they start blaming the victim.

However, a case can be made for the fact that the language proficiency that is aimed at in most policy documents, is not an explicit knowledge of the language that can be defined from a structure perspective, but is related much more to an agency perspective: What policy makers aim at, is that people within Europe can accomplish tasks and use the language appropriate to the task accomplishment. The question that can be raised here is whether explicit transfer of information on a language as it is defined in structure terms, is the best way to help people develop this skill. From literature on language acquisition (Hulstijn 2005; Paradis 2004, Paradis 2009; Lourdes Ortega 2009), a case can be made for supporting implicit learning of language, by bringing people in a situation in which they need to function in a certain way, and at the same time, making sure that that situation is safe to experiment in. In a lot of educational instances, these two characteristics supporting implicit learning are not observed. Students do not get to perform meaningful tasks unless they have first worked through a considerable amount of explicit knowledge on the language. And the environment is seldom made safe. On the contrary, the unsafeness of the learning situation is often a consequence of effective explicit language learning. Explicit language learning thrives in homogeneous groups. When all of the students do not know any of the language elements that are being passed on, but all of the elements the new elements are supposed to be connected with, then the efforts of the teacher of passing on information on language will be most successful. In order to find out whether the group is homogeneous enough, language tests are used. These tests are called diagnostic, in the sense that they may point at the fact that a student needs more exposure time. In a lot of instances, however, they are used to test the homogeneity of the group. If that homogeneity is too low, some students may be forced to take a course over again, to leave the group they were functioning in, or to be sent home with a bad report card and facing the anger of the parents. From a structure perspective on language, the use of tests in this way looks as sound educational practice. From the point of view of students, however, it is an extremely threatening exercise. By introducing tests, that have serious consequences when one fails, the environment is made unsafe. Since that student has had as much time on task as his/her fellow students, and was taught by the same teacher, it must mean that the cognitive abilities of that students are too limited (or the student does not put in enough effort) to function in that class group. In

this way, every test becomes a potential threat to the position of the student in the group. In a lot of schools teaching foreign languages all over Europe, test results for all subjects, including languages, determine whether the student may advance a year or not. The question that arises here is how this unsafe environment affects implicit language learning. Kaufman et al. (2010) relate implicit learning to the personality trait of openness to experience. As threatening situations do not promote openness to experience at all, it can be assumed that they diminish the chances of implicit language learning. Dreyfus (1996, 2004), in applying Merleau Ponty's (1962) phenomenology of embodiment to skill acquisition develops a five stage model, in which he allows for explicit rule and element transfer in the beginning stages of acquisition, but points at the fact that in the later stages, explicit goal orientation loses much of its initial appeal. He describes acquisition as an effort made to find equilibrium in a given situation, yielding the satisfaction of the equilibrium that is found. His ideas (about the superiority of explicit learning for beginners and of learning through meaningful tasks) are corroborated by the results of Dixon et al. (2012) who examined the results of L2-learning in the U.S in 71 different studies from four different fields (foreign language education, child language research, sociocultural studies, and psycholinguistics). Again, trying to ward off the threat experienced in a given situation puts the more experienced language student in a different position than a student trying to master language in order to do things with it. The equilibrium that will be sought after in both situations will be different. Chances are that in the unsafe situation, the safety that is sought after does not stimulate implicit language learning.

4 A few examples

– First of all, let us establish the structure perspective on language in European language policies. Let me refer to the 'mother tongue + 2' policy aimed at stimulating the proficiency in foreign languages within the European Union. It is clear from the formulation of the policy that language is seen here as a countable entity and not as the faculty to use the appropriate language in diverse situations. In the same vein, it is interesting to see that the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), a system to measure language proficiency in multilingual Europe, starts from so called 'can do' scales, but proceeds to try and fit these scales into levels, indicating how far ahead someone is with the mastery of a certain language, more or less regardless of the situation it needs to be used in (see, e.g., North 2000; Little 2006). Hulstijn, among others, has indicated that the different levels that were identified cannot be seen as a mere unidimensional indication of language

proficiency. He discusses the fact that the scales values for the higher levels of proficiency (B2, C1, C2) typically involve activities that educated people find themselves in and, as such, are hardly attainable for people not engaging in that type of activities (Hulstijn 2007, Hulstijn 2011, Hulstijn 2014).

The efforts to improve language education by introducing new methods and looking for more time do not really seem to have a large effect. Let me give two examples of ineffective policy.

- First of all, there is the story of a master student of mine, who had to interview people of Turkish heritage in Flanders for her master thesis. At some point, she came into my office and asked the question whether it was normal that the people she interviewed and who were able to have an interesting conversation with her (on the education of their children) all spoke dialect, and that the people speaking a more standard variety of Dutch had to ask her a number of times to rephrase her questions, and were not able to elaborate on their opinions. The interesting point here is that most of the Flemish heritage people in the region she did her research in, speak dialect on a daily basis, but that there are no courses teaching dialect. All courses on offer teach standard Dutch. That implies that the Turkish heritage people speaking dialect, acquired that dialect interacting with Flemish heritage people in community life, whereas the people speaking a more standard form of the language, probably followed a course in which Dutch was taught from a structure perspective. However, observations of this nature do not necessarily lead to the creation of participatory environments in which people from minority groups can acquire Dutch in a safe environment. In the recent government formation agreement in Flanders (Vlaamse Regering 2014) some intentions towards enabling participation are mentioned, but the most concrete measures deal with offering more courses in Standard Dutch, and introducing a test that new arrivals have to pass in order to be accepted in society.
- Another interesting example is provided by the foreign language monitor of the European Commission (2012). This monitor compares the proficiency in the foreign languages taught in the member states of the EU. Much to the dismay of a lot of people in the Flemish educational world, who regard Flemish people as the World Champions in foreign language skills, Flanders is scoring extremely low when the first foreign language taught in schools in the EU is looked at. Of course, unlike in most other regions, that first foreign language in Flanders is French. When the scores on proficiency of English are compared among the different countries, Flanders scores second best in Europe. So although less time is spent on English than on French, the profi-

> ciency in English of the average student is much higher than the proficiency in French. The proficiency is also much higher than the proficiency of students in other European countries, even when these students in other countries spend more time on English than they do in Flanders. As a matter of fact, in primary education in Flanders, pupils get two years of French and no English. Nevertheless, when asked about their proficiency in both languages, almost all students rate their proficiency in English as higher than their proficiency in French (Sbarcea and Jaspaert, forthcoming).

It is clear from both examples that what determines the outcome in terms of language proficiency is not the four characteristics mentioned as the basis for explicit learning, but the role a language plays in the group one belongs to or wants to belong to. When that language is an important aspect of social life, and the language learner experiences that (s)he can be a valued member of the group involved in that social life, (s)he will acquire that language. When, however, language proficiency in the dominant language is treated as a sort of entrance ticket to that group, so that when one fails to acquire the language, one is not let in, the circumstances for implicit learning are not fulfilled, and language learning will be difficult, especially in the more expert stages of proficiency acquisition. That is exactly what happens when policy makers look for solutions using a structure concept of language when trying to solve problems of situated functioning. What this amounts to in terms of integration of immigrants and people from minority groups, is that the commonly held idea, which is translated into much policy, that knowledge of the language leads to integration, is not true. It is integration that leads to a better command of the language, not the other way around.

Now the problem with language policy is that it is developed by people who are consciously dealing with language and want to solve a problem that other people encounter in their situated behavior. In a lot of instances, solutions are proposed for a problem in people's agency from a concept that resides as structure in the cultural system. Variability is in a lot of cases seen as the enemy, whereas the solution for the problem lies in bringing about the variation in language use that the situation requires. Moreover, the structure concept of language which policy makers use as the basis of their actions, reinforces social inequality. So, as a lot of instances of language policy are aimed at emancipation, in reality they offer a solution which looks socially neutral but which is not. And when the developers of the specific language policy do not make this mistake, chances are that the people who need to implement it translate the policy into structure terms, giving priority to uniformity and not to the emergence of variability. Here, too, a number of examples can clarify matters. The first one deals

with the recognition of minority languages, the second one has to do with language policy in schools.

– *The European Charter for regional or minority languages* (Council of Europe 1992) was launched by the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe on June 25th 1992. It provided a framework for the official recognition of languages other than the official language(s) of member states. The Charter also explicitly excluded dialects of the official languages from recognition. So it is clear here that the aim is to protect the linguistic diversity in Europe, but that the starting point of the policy is a structure concept of language, a concept which allows for recognition of ideal forms of languages.
  In the Netherlands it was clear very early on that the Charter was going to be ratified and used to officially recognize Frisian as a language in its own right. During the Parliamentary debates on the matter, however, the issue was raised that *Nedersaksisch* needed to be recognized also. In the end, not only Frisian and *Nedersaksisch* were recognized, but Limburgian as well. This recognition of Limburgian raised a number of interesting issues with regard to language policy, how it can be set up and implemented. One of these issues is how one decides what is a language and what is a dialect. From a linguistic point of view, the different linguistic codes used in Limburg have always been considered dialects of Dutch. One can observe, however, that when people step in who have enough symbolic power and who know which strings to pull, a dialect can suddenly be turned into a language. One of the characteristics of the situation of Limburgian is that there is not really a uniform variety of Limburgian that is used in certain domains throughout the whole region. As soon as Limburgian was recognized, the debate started on the necessity of such a variety and on the form that variety needed to have. This shows that uniformity really follows variation and not the other way around, and that questions of a correct form of 'a' language are raised as soon as a collection of ways of speaking are recognized from a structure concept of language. The debate has the potential of leading to the devaluation of the language some people use on a daily basis as corrupt forms of Limburgian. In that way the Charter for the recognition of regional and minority language might result in the opposite of what it was created to do.
– In Flanders, the influx of pupils with a mother tongue other than Dutch has given rise to numerous policy initiatives aimed at supporting the educational development of these children. The basic idea underlying these initiatives is that it is important for these children to acquire a good command of Dutch, especially Dutch as it is used as a language of instruction. At the same time, policy developers have realized that efforts to support the acquisition of Dutch of these children should go hand in hand with initiatives that value

their mother tongue in the educational context, the central idea being that a negative approach to linguistic diversity will have a backward effect on the further language development of these children. Policy makers have called on schools to develop their own 'languages policies' using the plural to make clear that those policies should not have an exclusive focus on Dutch. In this way schools are invited to become institutions developing and implementing policies aimed at the same time at the development of the dominant language and at the celebration of multilingualism.

In their evaluation of the languages policies of the schools (Onderwijsspiegel 2010), the Flemish Education Inspection shows that only a minority of schools (24% of primary schools, 4% of secondary schools) have a well developed languages policy. Moreover, these policies are almost exclusively aimed at supporting the development of Dutch. Some schools have added some initiatives dealing with modern foreign languages (in the Flemish context, French, English and German). There seems to be little or no structural attempt to boost the value of the languages other than Dutch that pupils bring to school.

A recent large scale study on the educational success of minority students in secondary schools (Clycq et al. 2014) gives some more insight into what these languages policies really are about. Teachers in a large number of schools in Ghent, Antwerp and Genk are interviewed on the nature and the effects of the languages policy in their schools. Iconic for what goes on in schools is the story of one teacher who tells the interviewer that when pupils are caught speaking their own mother tongue, they have to pay € 0.20. In order not to discriminate, children with Dutch as a mother tongue have to pay € 0.20 as well when they are overheard making racist remarks. This money is kept in an envelope, and when there is enough money there, it is used to treat all children to something to eat. The Turkish children are offered kebab, and the Flemish children French fries (the traditional Flemish dish) because, in the words of the teacher 'it is, of course, important to acknowledge the identity of the children.'

In stable societies, the fact that solutions for coordination problems in language use are structured in policies and consequently use a structure perspective on language, may go relatively unnoticed. In these societies, the coordination problems that occur remain more or less the same. When the policy developers did a good job, they will have developed a policy that can provide answers to those coordination problems, and, in that way, remain functional. The main objection to these structure oriented approaches to coordination problems in language is that by making use of a structure concept of language, which is itself an objectifi-

cation and reproduction of social structure, they tend to reproduce social inequality in society.

With societies in rapid change, however, the problem with this kind of solutions becomes considerably larger. As society changes, the nature of the coordination problems that arise, changes also. The solutions that have been thought of, and that have been reified as autonomous, valuable systems, lose much of their relevance in terms of solutions for the new coordination problems. At that moment, the use of the system, and the adherence to the structure that has been set up by the policy, is defended in its own right, disregarding the fact whether that system and structure adequately solve the coordination problem. What is left is social reproduction without the benefit of coordination problems being solved.

5 Towards a more effective language policy

The problem I have outlined above is that a policy which starts from a concept of language which determines a uniform language as ideal, will subsequently result in dividing the language people produce in separate entities (languages or language varieties) which become each others' competitors. That kind of policy is used in a lot of instances to support the emancipation of people. For those people, the language form which is propagated will always divert from their present use of language, and in that sense create a situation of variability. As either the policy makers themselves or the people implementing the policy see that external, uniform language as an ideal, they devaluate other forms of language and the situations that presented the coordination problems these forms of language were an answer to (cfr Nussbaum 2012). From an educational point of view, making people acquire that ideal form of language needs skilled teachers and time. As teachers are the ones that need to implement the policy, they are not inclined to see themselves as not skilled enough. So that leaves time as a main factor. Since the ideal uniform language system is not situated, in the sense that it is made socially sterile through objectification (cfr supra), that time can be sought after in any situation. So the situations in which other forms of language are used become the enemy of the emancipation efforts, since all the time spent using those 'incorrect' or 'inappropriate' forms is not spent dealing with the ideal language. In this way, the language policy becomes prescriptive. It was aimed at introducing variation in the language use of people by helping them use a different variety of language in certain situations because using that variety would offer them chances for emancipation, but now it turns against the people that it wanted to help in the first place. They are considered not willing or able to spend the time

necessary for the language policy to succeed. That spending that time would imply using a form of language which does not offer adequate solutions for the coordination problems specific for that particular situation, is blocked from view by the concept of language that is used.

In most cases it would be better not to have a policy at all than having a form of prescriptive policy as described above. Imagine a Turkish heritage student learning Physics in a Flemish school. The physics problems the student needs to understand are written up in Dutch in the textbook the student uses, and are explained, again in Dutch, by the teacher. Suppose the proficiency in Dutch of the student is not high enough to understand what is being explained. A good teacher will let the student use all skills (s)he has to come to an understanding of the physics problem, including all skills in other languages or language varieties than Standard Dutch. Chances are that when this student manages to find a solution to the coordination problem (s)he finds him/herself in, using whatever language that is useful under the circumstances, (s)he will also understand what has been explained in Dutch and learn from it. For this to happen, no language policy is needed. All that is necessary is a good teacher, a teacher who does not tie the hand of the student to his/her back, but who stimulates him/her to use all of the skills that are available to him/her to manage the learning situation.

If a policy is developed, what is needed is not a prescriptive policy but policy that is facilitating, a policy that helps teachers help students. Language policy should aim at creating quarter for language use. I know that with the label quarter, I am using an somewhat archaic word which, if it is at all used nowadays, is very often used in a context where the word 'no' occurs (no quarter asked, no quarter given). In my mind this 'quarter' should not be refused, nor should it only be given when asked. As the word refers to a safehaven, a place where it is safe to try things one is not sure he/she can accomplish yet, this 'quarter' should be created for those we want to emancipate. In that sense the word catches the exact meaning I want to convey here.

This kind of policy requires an agency concept of language. What is important is that people mobilize all of their language skills to get a certain job in a given situation done. Creating quarter through language policy might be counterproductive when a structure concept of language lies at the core of that policy. Let us return to the example of what happens when the government decides to make room for minority languages in education to illustrate this observation. Back in 1988, I was involved in a project that aimed at introducing minority languages in the secondary school context. As the project was a success, the Flemish government decided to include the introduction of minority languages into the educational priority policy that was started in 1990. Much to our surprise we noticed that, although support for this action was high at the onset of the policy, after a

couple of years, it started to fade away. When we inquired in the schools why this was the case, what we found out was this: The school management saw the advantages of being more positive about an important background element of their students, and decided to introduce these languages. But the first thing the persons that were brought into the schools to support these languages noticed, was that the kids did not use the 'proper' form of that language. So in a lot of cases, they set out to teach these children the proper form, in this way putting these children for the Procrustean choice of being alienated from their own language or turning their backs on the language offer the school had presented them with in an attempt to help them function better. A lot of school principals could not understand why a lot of pupils made the second choice.

Instead, creating quarter for language use refers to a policy that facilitates people to accomplish tasks using the full scope of their linguistic abilities. In order to do so people should be offered the opportunity to function in a situation for which they do not master the necessary language skills, where they are helped when the lack of language skills threatens the successful accomplishment of the task, and which is made safe for them to experiment in. When in that kind of situation language is used in a way the situation requires, chances are that implicit learning will steer these people to the acquisition and use of that language. For some this move towards implicit learning may go fast, other may take some more time.

This idea about creating quarter does not mean that there is no more room for explicit instruction. As Dreyfus and Dreyfus (2004) point out and Dixon et al. (2012) confirm, persons without knowledge of a language used in a given situation will benefit more from explicit teaching than from implicit learning. And, of course, some aspects of language are more easily dealt with explicitly than implicitly (orthography, technical terminology, e.g.). The fact that explicit attention is paid to certain language aspects is not a problem, the problem starts when people see the learning of this explicitly provided information as the goal of the learning activity, and not the fact that the knowledge provided can be used during the accomplishment of a certain task.

Let me again give an example, starting from the policy at one particular school and moving towards more general aspects of policy.

– A secondary school in Flanders is famous for the plays they stage. Students are screened at the beginning of the year, only the best are enrolled in the activity. The play is supervised by teachers who have a clear concept of what theatre should be like. They direct the students in the most literal sense of the word. With the commemoration of World War I, however, some students went up to the management of the school and asked whether they could stage a performance dedicated to the remembrance of the civilians of the town who

were victims in that war. The school agreed and facilitated the students as much as possible. The teachers involved acted as resource persons: they helped the students make up their minds when they ran into something they could not solve. The result was that much more students got involved, and the play became a project which all of these students invested more time and energy in than when it would have been a traditional school assignment. At a certain point, a quarrel emerged between two of the leading students in the project. Other students chose sides. The school management did not step in and solve the problem in one or the other direction, but again facilitated the opportunities for the students to work out their differences. In the end the theatrical performance was, by traditional standards, not as good as it would have been, had it been directed by the teachers from beginning to end, but a lot more students had learned a lot more about how to use language in a situation of cooperation on a project. They had learned to disagree and sort out their disagreements in language, they had learned to convince fellow students of their approach, they had learned the difference between saying something which their friends found funny, and staging the same fact for an audience that was very heterogeneous.

- When we look at policy issued by the government, the problem of minority children underachieving in Western education is a question that draws a lot of attention from policy makers. It is a problem many Western countries face, but I will concentrate on what goes on in Flanders. In Flanders the issue has been regarded as a problem related to the poor command of the Dutch that is used in education. Since the beginning of the 1990's, a lot of policy effort has gone into the matter. Some results can be claimed, but the problem remains unsolved to a large extent. It is hard to establish what caused the progress, but with regard to this paper, it is interesting to note that the positive evolution coincided with the introduction of task based language learning (Van den Branden 2006) in a large number of schools hosting minority pupils. As task based language teaching provides interesting tasks to students, and offers meaningful language input, not as an objective of study, but as a way of making meaning and supporting the pupils in attaining the goals set in the task, the language acquisition of the pupils is stimulated in the way described above. Remarkably, it proved a hard ordeal to make teachers use the task based materials that were developed in the way they were meant to be used. Two examples to illustrate this fact.
  - In order to create time to work on these tasks, the Center for Language and Education (CTO) of KU Leuven developed an alternative spelling method of which they could show that pupils reached an comparable result to pupils in traditional classes in about half the time. It was baffling for the

developers of the method that hardly any school adopted it. It was only when the concept of language was brought into the equation, that they could make sense of this refusal: From a structure perspective on language, learning a language takes time (Characteristic 2, cfr supra). So subjects the school spends much time on are more important than subject the school spends less time on. Spending less time on spelling meant, from a worldview in which the structure concept of language dominates conscious thinking about and planning of language education, that spelling became less important. And as spelling is, of course, from that point of view one of the primary matters in correctness of language (most people find spelling mistakes the most deadly sins a language user can make), paying less attention to it was for most teachers not an option.

– CTO also developed a task based method for the teaching of French at the primary school. In the first lesson, teachers were supposed to show a video of a police inspector, who told the class that a painting had been stolen in Liège (in the French speaking part of Belgium), and there was good reason to believe that the painting was hidden in the neighborhood of the school. The pupils were asked for assistance in retrieving the painting. Of course, the pupils, not knowing any French, did not understand the message. The idea was that the teacher told them that (s)he did not understand the message either, but that it seemed to be about a stolen painting, and that the police inspector asked for their cooperation. At that point, pupils could begin to decipher the message, finding out for themselves (with the aid of the teacher) which words were used and what these words meant. The method was not a success. Almost all teachers, again starting from the concept of language as an external system, thought it their duty to look for the new words themselves and teach them to the children prior to showing the video. As a result the course in French started with three weeks of tedious word learning, and after that, no child believed that it would yield an expansion of his/her lifeworld and offer them chances to do things they could not do previous to their learning French.

The government reacted to the fact that the introduction of TBLT had not managed to solve the problem of underachievement of minority children with new policy measures. These measures were typically thought of from a structure concept of language. One of these measures was the introduction of tests at the end of kindergarten and at the end of primary school. The idea behind the tests was that they would show how far pupils were lagging behind, so that extra measures could be taken to do away with the arrears. Typically, the measures that

were envisaged, all dealt with the factor time: children lagging behind at the beginning of primary or secondary school would be obliged to spend extra time acquiring the language. In a lot of instances, buying extra time for them would mean that they are forced to leave the group they are in. For most students, the effect of a bad test would be felt as a punishment. In that sense, the cure would be worse than the disease, in that it created an unsafe environment in which the implicit learning of these children came to a halt. That the group felt this way, was made clear through a number of house visits that were carried out with Turkish heritage children. A number of the parents refused to be interviewed because, as they put it, 'it would end up anyway by blaming them for everything that went wrong with their children at school'.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, I started from the double concept of language and the relation between the two concepts. I pleaded for the view in which language is seen as inherently variable, and the uniform concept of language is derived from that inherently variable language through processes of norm formation. I related both concepts to what in RST is seen as structure and agency. I also argued that the structure approach to language is, at a surface level, socially sterile, but is in fact an objectification of social inequality. Then I went on to show that most language policies aimed at emancipating people, are based on a structure concept of language. The consequences of such an approach were discussed. The outcome of the discussion was that we did not need prescriptive but facilitating policies.

What the government should do in terms of policy, is create the facilities through which teachers could put children to work on something they really would like to accomplish. While doing so, teachers can provide relevant input in Dutch. Explicit language teaching can provide the language elements that are needed for the task accomplishment, especially for beginners. The government can also make the situation in which these pupils experiment with Dutch, safe by making sure that a failure to acquire does not result in punishment in one form or another. It can stimulate the use of didactic formats in which support is given to the pupils to help them accomplish the task at hand, for instance by creating conditions in which the stronger pupils help the weaker ones, in whatever language that seems helpful to them, in this way avoiding having to make the group homogeneous all the time. And the government should take measures to make clear to teachers that language is for doing things, and they are not the sentinels of society paid to guard the honor of an ideal language form.

I remember the story of a principal who had introduced task based language learning in primary school, and who had a mutiny of the parents of the children at hand. He called us to ask whether we could come in and talk to the parents. We did. After a long discussion, where we used every possible argument to defend the approach of the school, one of the parents said to us: 'You know, we have been to school, too. And we hated Dutch, it was so boring, so we gave up, and see where that brought us. My child comes to school and he actually likes Dutch. That can't be right. I want him to bite the bullit so he won't end up in our position.' If the policy is not supported by the parents, and by society at large, for that matter, we are bound to make the same mistakes over and over again. We need to reframe the issue (Lakoff 2008), and that is not an easy matter, especially when the issue that needs reframing is in itself an objectification of social inequality.

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